

EDITOR'S NOTE: Senator Cardin writes periodic columns for Maryland publications. The following column about the recently enacted Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act may be of interest to your readers. Please contact Susan Sullam at susan_sullam@cardin.senate.gov if you have any questions.

***PRECEDENT:** Senator Cardin is a member of five Senate committees: Foreign Relations, Judiciary, Environment and Public Works, Budget, and Small Business and Entrepreneurship. His web site is: cardin.senate.gov. He also can be found at YouTube.com/SenatorCardin*

AMERICANS ARE COMMITTED TO MAKING
OUR NATION BETTER
By U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin

The recently enacted *Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act* is in keeping with the spirit of our nation by making it easier for Americans to volunteer for national service, a hallmark of our country. This legislation was named in honor of Senator Kennedy and had strong bipartisan support in Congress because it helps foster our sense of community and shared responsibility for one another.

The *Serve America Act* dramatically increases funding for *AmeriCorps* and other volunteer programs, including those for seniors and veterans. It also establishes a goal of expanding from 75,000 government-supported volunteers to 250,000. It also would increase education funding and establish a summer service program for students, paying \$500 (which would be applied to college costs) to high-school and middle-school students who participate.

The law amends the 1990 *National and Community Service Act* to expand and improve programs that promote service. Through the *Education Corps*, mentors provide support to keep our children in school and out of gangs. The *Learn and Serve America* program engages middle- and high-school students in meeting community needs. The *Clean Energy Service Corps* will help Americans weatherize their homes and lower their energy bills, and the *Veterans Corps* volunteers will help veterans readjust to civilian life and pursue educational and job opportunities.

The list goes on. I particularly want to draw attention to the *Healthy Futures Corps*, a program that I strongly support, particularly after the tragic death of 12-year-old Deamonte Driver of Prince George's County from an abscessed tooth. It will help close the health care gap by providing grants to states and non-profit organizations to fund community-based interventions. *Healthy Futures Corps* members will address certain health indicators, including chronic diseases, such as diabetes, and other conditions where we know there are socioeconomic, geographic, and racial and ethnic disparities.

As our recession has spread and deepened, I've talked with many of Maryland's non-profit service organizations, and the message is the same: the need for services has increased, while donations have decreased. Interestingly, the number of volunteers eager to serve has increased. People are willing to donate their time, even though they might be less able to afford monetary donations.

In promoting the involvement of Americans of all ages, this new law promotes a lifetime of service. I am pleased that our state already has a strong commitment to public service. The Corporation for National and Community Service reports that more than 170,000 Marylanders now participate in 115 national service projects across our state. But there's always room for more. This new law gives our state and the nation additional tools to answer the call to service.

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